

“The Ocean in Us”: Navigating the Blue Humanities and Diasporic Chamoru Poetry

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Abstract: This essay will explore the complex relationship between Pacific Islander Literature and the “Blue Humanities,” navigation traditions and canoe aesthetics, and Chamoru migration and diaspora. First, I will chart the history, theory, and praxis of Pacific voyaging traditions; the colonial history of restricting indigenous mobilities; and the decolonial acts of seafaring revitalization in the Pacific (with a specific focus on Guam). Then, I will examine the representation of seafaring and the ocean-going vessel (the canoe) as powerful symbols of Pacific migration and diasporic cultural identity in the context of what Elizabeth DeLoughrey termed, “narrative maritime legacies” (2007). Lastly, I will conduct a close-reading of the avant-garde poetry collection, *A Bell Made of Stones* (2013), by Chamoru writer Lehua Taitano. As I will show, Taitano writes about the ocean and navigation in order to address the history and traumas of Chamoru migration and diaspora. In terms of poetic form, I will argue that Taitano’s experimentation with typography and visual poetry embodies Chamoru outrigger design aesthetics and navigational techniques. In the end, I will show how a “Blue Humanities” approach to reading Pacific Islander literature highlights how the “New Oceania” is a profound space of Pacific migration and diasporic identity.

Keywords: Blue Humanities; Pacific Islander literature

1. Navigating the Blue Humanities

In this essay, I examine the poetry book *A Bell Made of Stones* (2013) by award-winning diasporic Chamoru author Lehua Taitano. Chamorus are the indigenous Pacific Islanders of the Marianas archipelago in the western Pacific region known as Micronesia. I will argue that Taitano’s work represents the ocean as not simply a vast, empty horizon, but as a real and symbolic space of Chamoru migration and diasporic identity. To analyze the poetry, I develop and enact a “transoceanic” reading methodology informed by the interdisciplinary research of the Blue Humanities and Pacific Islands Studies, an essential field of scholarship that is often excluded from discussions of Ocean Studies. The first aspect of a transoceanic reading methodology involves charting the “wet” contexts of Taitano’s work, including Chamoru ontologies, epistemologies, histories, politics, and culture related to the ocean. This will include a discussion of Chamoru canoe design, navigational techniques, and the history of voyaging traditions and their colonial suppression and current revitalization. Chamoru voyaging is important because it is the main way that Chamorus have interacted with the ocean. Relatedly, I map the fluid histories and routes of Chamoru migration and diaspora because this movement has been theorized in terms of voyaging across oceanic spaces. The second aspect of a transoceanic reading methodology includes a deep dive and close-reading of Taitano’s book to highlight how she represents the ocean as a diasporic Chamoru space, as well as how she articulates the relationship between visual poetic form, Chamoru navigational techniques, and the oceanic space of the page. I hope this essay will add to the discourses of the Blue Humanities and World Literature Studies by insisting on a rigorous, critical engagement with the scholars and insights of Pacific Islands Studies and the innovative poetics of Pacific Islanders, who have for millennia lived and migrated across the largest ocean on the planet.

The theoretical currents of the Blue Humanities have shaped my transoceanic methodology. I have been guided by a bright constellation of diverse scholars—including Paul Gilroy, Marcus Rediker, Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Earle, Peter Neill, Stefan Helmreich, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Rob Wilson, and Astrida Neimanis, among others—who draw attention to the material and symbolic surfaces and depths of the ocean to show how the ocean shapes human knowledge, experiences, histories, politics, economies, cultures, and identities. Several other brilliant scholars—including Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Margaret Cohen, Steve Mentz, and Teresa Shewry—have emphasized how the real and symbolic presence of the sea shapes the themes and forms of oral and written storytelling traditions and texts. More recently, a flotilla of special issues in the PMLA (“Oceanic Studies”), *Atlantic Studies* (“Oceanic Studies”), *Comparative Literature* (“Oceanic Routes”), and *English Language Notes* (“Hydro-Criticism”) have further articulated an “oceanic turn.” The scholars in these issues—including DeLoughrey, Hester Blum, Kerry Bystrom, Isabel Hofmeyr, Ashley Cohen, and Laura Winkiel, among others—envision a “transoceanic imaginary” and new “sea ontologies,” “metageographies,” and “metaphorics of the sea” that move beyond the boundaries and methodologies of land and nation-state based perspectives, while also foregrounding the colonization, territorialization, and militarization of the oceans. They map a “Critical Ocean Studies” that flows across disciplines; dives into submarine depths and submersions; swims into multispecies entanglements; intersects with feminist, indigenous, and diasporic epistemologies; recognizes the agency of a warming, rising ocean; and transforms our critical inquiries and reading practices.

Alongside the Blue Humanities, my transoceanic reading methodology is rooted within Pacific Islands Cultural and Literary Studies, which has often been invisible at worst, and marginalized at best, within discussions of Oceanic Studies, which tend to focus on the Atlantic Ocean and its corresponding Atlantic Worlds. Maori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville points out this marginalization in her profound essay, “Where Oceans Come From,” and insists that Oceanic Studies must engage with the intellectual work and perspectives of “those who have not needed a ‘turn to the sea’ because we were already there” (Te Punga Somerville 2017, p. 28). Any Blue Humanities and World Literature project must do more than merely mention the Pacific in a superficial academic gesture; instead, scholars must rigorously and critically engage with the histories and cultures of the Pacific Islands, the insights of Pacific Studies, and the traditional knowledge and emerging scholarship of indigenous Pacific Islanders who have not only lived with the ocean for millennia, but who have already been here theorizing how the ocean shapes our knowledge and literature. This complicates the assumption that critical ocean studies is entirely “new” and asks us to consider who is making the “turn.” By acknowledging this complication, we can re-map the complex strands of the intellectual and literary genealogy of the Blue Humanities. The major scholar of Pacific oceanic studies is the Tongan writer and anthropologist, Epeli Hau’ofa, who penned a seminal essay, “Our Sea of Islands,” that re-conceptualized the Pacific as “a sea of islands” (or, “Oceania”) as opposed to “islands in a far sea.” He argued that the latter suggests smallness, remoteness, and insignificance, while the former is a “more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships” (Hau’ofa 1994, pp. 152–53). This new perspective denotes how the “world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment are at home with the sea : : : Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean” (ibid., pp. 153–60). Additionally, other Pacific scholars—including Albert Wendt, Teresia Teaiwa, Vince Diaz, and Kehaulani Kauanui, among others—remind us of our oceanic genealogies, geographies, connections, mobilities, migrations, bodies, and imaginations. In terms of contemporary Pacific Islander literature, its emergence during the 1960s and 1970s (a period of decolonization in the region) is often conceptualized as a “first wave.” Significantly, the first novels, poetry collections, literary journals, and anthologies written and edited by Pacific islanders were described as symbolic canoes. In another seminal essay in *Pacific Studies*, “Towards a New Oceania,” Samoan author Albert Wendt details how the Pacific “artistic renaissance is enriching our cultures further, reinforcing our identities/self-respect/and pride, and taking us through a genuine decolonization; it is also acting as a unifying force in our region. In their

individual journeys into the Void, these artists, through their work, are explaining us to ourselves and creating a new Oceania" (Wendt 1976, p. 60). During this period the ocean-going vessel became a "master trope for Pacific literary production," a "maritime narrative legacy," and a vital icon, symbol, theme, and metaphor to express a "transoceanic imaginary that highlights vast kinship networks" (DeLoughrey 2007, pp. 96, 129). With this in mind, I now turn to Taitano's *A Bell Made of Stones*, a vessel that navigates oceanic cultural identity from a migratory and diasporic perspective.

2. Navigating Chamoru Voyaging and Migration Traditions

Taitano was born in 1978 on the island of Guåhan (Guam), which is the largest, most populated, and southernmost island of the Marianas archipelago. Around 1500 B.C., the Chamorus sailed in outrigger canoes from Austronesia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Taiwan) and became the first peoples to inhabit what is now known as the "Marianas" archipelago and develop complex, matrilineal societies (Rogers 1995). The main way Chamorus interacted with the ocean was aboard outrigger canoes. Chamorus developed an innovative outrigger canoe design that included asymmetrical hulls with an identical (hence interchangeable) bow and stern, and inverted lateen sails. The mast, which rested on the outrigger side as opposed to extending to the bottom of the hull, held the sail aloft. Since the bow and stern were identical, the canoe tacked by moving the sail from one end of the canoe to the other (Haddon and Hornell 1975; Shell 1992). The sail was woven from pandanus, and the hulls were carved from the trunk of the breadfruit tree. The mast, yard, boom, and planks were made from different kinds of native hardwoods and bamboo. Planks were lashed together with coconut fiber rope, and seams were caulked with heated breadfruit sap or powdered quicklime mixed with coconut oil (Artero 2014; Bevacqua 2014). Different canoes had different names in the Chamoru language: canoes without sails were known as panga; a small reef canoe was called galaide'; small and medium sized outrigger canoes with sails were termed duduli, dudings, or lelek; and the largest, ocean-going vessels were called sakman.

The title of Taitano's collection, *A Bell Made of Stones*, refers to traditional Chamoru culture. Specifically, it refers to the stone megaliths, known in Chamoru as latte, that form the stone foundation of ancestral Chamoru dwellings and large canoe houses. An individual latte is composed of a haligi (vertical pillar) and a tasa (bowl-shaped capstone). The haligi ranges in height from three to nine feet and stands wide at the base and narrow towards the top. The tasa sits atop the haligi via a cavity or groove in the bottom of the tasa (Cunningham 2009). When constructed, the latte resembles a bell made of stones. Thus, the title also alerts us to two of the major themes of the book: home and voyaging.

Taitano's first home was in the village of Yigo, in northern Guåhan. Her mother, Catherine Flores Taitano, was Chamoru, and her father, Ralph David Shelton, was a White American airman in the U.S. Air Force, stationed at Andersen Air Force Base, just north of Yigo. Taitano's genealogy reflects the entangled colonial history of Guåhan. In 1521, Spanish galleons arrived to the shores of Guåhan, marking first contact between Pacific Islanders and Europeans (Rogers 1995). Ferdinand Magellan referred to the archipelago as "Islas de las Velas Latinas" ("Islands of Lateen Sails") and Guåhan as "Isla de las Ladrones" ("Island of the Thieves"), which became "the first inhabited island in the Pacific Ocean known to Europeans" (Diaz 2011, p. 1). Spain nominally claimed Guåhan in 1564, establishing its first Pacific colony. In the following decades, galleons loaded with silver, soldiers, merchants, missionaries, government officials, mail, and supplies from Mexico disembarked from Acapulco and re-provisioned on Guåhan before arriving in the Philippines to trade with Chinese merchants. The Spanish empire mapped "a great circular loop around the Pacific north of the equator", with Guåhan as "a sure and useful landmark and stopover on the trans-Pacific trade route" (ibid., p. 15). In 1668, Spanish authorities officially colonized the island and shortly thereafter initiated the Christian conquest of the Pacific by establishing a mission to Guåhan (Wiecko 2013). The Catholic authorities renamed the archipelago, "Islas de Marianas," to honor the Queen of Spain, Maria Ana de Austria, who funded the mission. Many Chamorus resisted the conversion efforts, which led to nearly three decades of active conflict referred to as the "Spanish-Chamorro Wars" (1668–1695). By the end of the war,

Christian conversion, military conquest, and foreign disease led to massive Chamoru depopulation. The surviving Chamoru population were forcefully removed from their islands and relocated to mission villages. To immobilize and control the Chamoru population, the Spanish authorities forbade them from building outrigger canoes, sailing the open ocean, and fishing beyond the reef (Wiecko 2013). Chamorus were severed from their canoe and voyaging traditions, and the navigational stories, chants, songs, rituals, and maps were lost (this suppression of voyaging traditions would occur throughout the Pacific during the colonial period) (DeLoughrey 2007; D'Arcy 2006; Feinberg 1995).

The Spanish–American War of 1898 ended Spanish control of the Marianas, and the United States annexed Guåhan. A series of landmark Supreme Court cases, collectively known as the Insular Cases (1901–1922), created a new political category of the “unincorporated territory,” which meant that a territory could be a possession of the United States without becoming a fully incorporated part of the nation. The Insular Cases signaled “a rupture in the previous logic of territorial acquisition. Overseas imperialism is not simply an extension of westward continental expansion but a new perspective that allowed for unincorporation as opposed to the two choices of incorporation or colonial control” (Lai 2011, p. 5). From 1898–1941, the U.S. Navy administered Guåhan and established schools, hospitals, businesses, and roads as part of their “civilizing” and “militarizing” mission. Guåhan became a strategic location for U.S. military transports traveling between San Francisco, Hawai’i, and the Philippines (Rogers 1995). In December 1941, Japan invaded Guåhan, defeated the U.S. forces, and occupied the island. Guåhan was renamed “Omiya Jima,” or “Great Shrine Island,” and Japanese authorities initiated several militarizing and civilizing projects in order to transform Guåhan into a strategic base for Japan’s vision of a “Co-Prosperity Sphere of Greater East Asia” (Peattie 1992, p. 16). In 1944, the U.S. military invaded Guåhan, defeated the Japanese forces, and re-colonized the island. Residents of Guåhan would become U.S. citizens in 1950 with the passing of an Organic Act. Throughout the following decades, the U.S. militarily refurbished Guåhan into an “unsinkable U.S. communications and logistics platform, monitoring satellites and missiles, supporting antisubmarine and B-52 bomber operations, and harboring prepositions supply ships for rapid deployment strike forces” (Rogers 1995, pp. 51–52). The island is one of the most militarized places in the world, and one of the most strategic U.S. military bases in the Pacific, often referred to as “USS Guam” (Kirk and Natividad 2010).

While this militarization brought Taitano’s father to Guåhan, it also led to the family’s migration when they moved to Asheville, North Carolina in 1982. Taitano was just four years old. Since then, Taitano has lived in North Carolina, Montana, and California. Her diasporic story is part of a longer history of Chamorro migration. Just as colonial powers suppressed Pacific voyaging traditions and transformed the ocean into colonial and military “highways,” these same powers launched Pacific Islanders into new migration routes and diasporic pathways (Spickard et al. 2002). From the beginning of American occupation in 1898 to the start of World War II, hundreds of Chamorus enlisted in the navy and would become the first significant number of Chamorus to migrate and not return. When Chamorus became U.S. citizens, enlistment in the armed forces increased exponentially, which in turn increased the number of Chamorus who migrated and lived near military bases in the California cities of San Diego, Long Beach, Vallejo, Alameda, and Fairfield. While “three-quarters of all Chamorus living outside Guam have been : : : currently or previously associated with the armed services” (Underwood 1985, p. 167), the remaining quarter of Chamorus out-migrated for education and economic opportunities, as well as for access to health care services. The introduction of jet travel made travel from Guåhan to California much easier; the journey could be made in just twelve hours. As a result of these changes, 30,000 Chamorus lived in the States by 1980; by 1990, that number grew to 50,000; by 2000, the population nearly doubled to 92,000. As of 2010, an estimated 150,000 Chamorus have settled in all fifty states and even in Puerto Rico. California is home to the largest Chamoru diasporic population, numbering around 45,000. Today, more Chamorus live in the diaspora than in the Mariana islands (Underwood 1985; Munoz 1984). Chamoru migration is often characterized in voyaging and navigational terms. Faye Untalan Munoz, for example, describes how the opportunity

for travel and migration re-ignited Chamoru “passion for traveling and exploration” that dated back to Chamoru seafaring days (Untalan 2009). Robert Underwood employs a water metaphor to conceptualize migration: “[w]hat began in 1937 as a trickle of mess attendants had become by the 1970s a steady stream of visitors, movers, and emigrants” (Underwood 1985, p. 173, my italics). He even visualized military service as the dominant “vehicle of departure” (ibid., p. 167), which relates to the Chamoru word for airplane: batkon aire, literally translated as air boat. Jesi Lujan Bennett discusses how, despite the vast dispersal of the Chamoru population, “Chamoru migrants have created a transpacific home, where there is a back and forth flow of communication, goods, and bodies between the Mariana Islands and their current location” (Bennett 2013, p. 4). In the 20th and 21st centuries, the movement and flow of Chamorus has transformed the ocean into a transpacific space of migration and diaspora.

3. Navigating Chamoru Diasporic Poetry

A Bell Made of Stones launches in a diasporic space. It opens with a letter addressed to an unnamed reader. The top of the letter is dated “April 2013,” and the location is listed as “a little room/in California/with wind and eucalyptus” (Taitano 2013, p. 9). The first paragraph of the letter intimately addresses the reader:

You are there, turning these words over in your hands, in your island heart. I am here, breathing salt air, sitting in a long slant of light, opening slowly to the story I wish to tell you. My only request: take these words out into the sun, into the wind, beside the ocean if possible. This space desires waves. (ibid.)

Asking the reader to carry the book beside the ocean suggests that the reader will embark on a journey as we turn the pages. For the speaker, her destination island is the reader’s “island heart” and the space between is a space where waves (ocean waves, sound waves) connect the I and you, here and there. The voyage is poignantly imagined as a story slowly opening.

The letter continues to describe a dream in which the speaker walks down a dirt path towards a Spanish mission and finds her ancestors and their living bones. They speak to her, but she doesn’t understand their language. Even though Taitano’s family spoke both Chamoru and English when they lived on Guåhan, her father forbade them from speaking Chamoru when the family moved to North Carolina because he insisted it would prevent her from “fitting in” (ibid., p. 11). This is common for many Chamorus, in which an “intergenerational language gap, whereby grandchildren do not speak the native tongue, is especially detrimental to cultural integrity : : : thereby marking a potential generational departure and virtual snipping of the indigenous umbilical cord” (Perez 2002, p. 465). This language gap, which is exacerbated by living in the diaspora far away from other Chamoru language speakers, alienates the poet from her Chamoru ancestors that she meets in the dream. If they were trying to teach her a navigational chant on how to return home, for example, there is no way of knowing. Because she can’t understand them, she remains silent and laments: “I have had my tongue cut out and then have been asked why I don’t have more to say” (Taitano 2013, p. 11).

Besides not speaking the language of her ancestors, the speaker also worries that her ancestors would not recognize her because of her light skin color. She writes: “In my bare feet I am Chamoru. And white, yes” (ibid., p. 9). Taitano describes her mixed-heritage as being composed of “disparate parts”. Taitano feels anxiety about not being recognized by her ancestors because she does not have a phenotypically “brown face”. This anxiety is extended to her experiences in the U.S. in which she doesn’t appear to be either brown or white “enough” to fit into recognizable racial categories. Taitano conceives this uncomfortable space as a hyphenated space: “This is the hyphen inside of me talking. Fused, spliced, separated, compounded : : : These are my intersections of half-ness. Of-lessness” (ibid., p. 11). Taitano’s experience as a diasporic, mixed-heritage Chamoru living between languages, cultures, racial categories, and geographic locations makes her feel ambivalent, displaced, and lost at sea.

The first poem after the epistolary preface is composed entirely of six words in the middle of an otherwise blank page: “inside me an island/shaped hole” (ibid., p. 13). Here, the journey is cast towards the interior; however, the destination island is a hole, an absence. Taitano’s poem echoes the title of another essay by Hau’ofa’s, “The Ocean in us”, in which he expands on the idea of “Oceania” and describes Pacific culture and identity as being “shaped in fundamental ways by the adaptive interactions between our people and the sea” (Hau’ofa 1998, p. 403). He insists that the ocean inspires us to “make new sounds, new rhythms, new choreographies, and new songs and verses about how wonderful and terrible the sea is, and how we cannot live without it : : The sea is our pathway to each other and to everyone else, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us” (ibid., pp. 408–9). Yet, while Hau’ofa envisions the presence of ancestors and the fullness of the ocean inside islanders, Taitano feels like her migration has created a hole where an island should be.

This theme of disconnection and loss continues in the very next poem in *A Bell Made of Stones*, which is titled “asamplingfromtheguamvisitorsbureau”. As the title informs, this poem collages text from the online website of the Guam Visitors Bureau. The poet uses the website to locate Guam in space: “theisland: 6000milesfromsanfrancisco/3800mileswestofhonolulu/1500milesouthofJapan” (ibid., p. 15). Strikingly, this poem (and many others in the collection) omit the spaces between words. One effect of this poetic technique is that it makes it difficult to read the signs; like a puzzle, the reader has to navigate, slow down, and parse the jumble of letters to make sense of the poem. The fact that Taitano looks to a tourism website to locate and learn about Guam shows her distance and disconnection from her home island. Turning to the internet to search for cultural information and connection is a common phenomenon for diasporic Chamorus who try to “remain culturally connected to one another via communication technology, mass media, long-distance familism and cultural continuity” (Perez 2002, p. 473). The internet is one-way diasporic Chamorus map the location of their cultural identity and, symbolically, their way home.

Besides omitting spaces between words, Taitano also composes with a typewriter; indeed, *A Bell Made of Stones* appears to be a scanned original of a manuscript that was produced on an actual typewriter. In the prefatory letter, Taitano explains that she wrote the poems on an old, “sea foam” colored typewriter that she bought at a flea market in a small, Appalachian town. To her, the “gridded keys” are islands “afloat yet firmly stationed in their neat rows, resting at neat angles” (Taitano 2013, p. 9). The word, “keys”, signifies not only the units of the typewriter and low islands or reefs, but it also signifies objects that open a lock, legends of a map, systems of tones or harmonies, and even sets of instructions to decipher codes. Interestingly, the speaker points out that her typewriter’s key for “a” sticks, so that “words like American and Chamoru are rendered with hiccups and enjambments” (ibid., p. 9). Even though the keys are metaphorically supposed to provide (or unlock) instructions, directions, and explanations, the fact that one key is off foregrounds the ambivalence that Taitano feels as a diasporic Chamoru. And if the typewriter is the sea and the keys are islands, then each “stroke” is the poet’s attempt to voyage across the great distances of memory, diaspora, cultural identity, and home. Taitano describes how each stroke, “[e]ach imprint, each metal sound, reverberates its dull clack, its certain hollow ache. A stamping. Each poem is visual evidence of this echo. The surfacing and submergence of islands of sound” (ibid., p. 11). Since the poet envisions the text of each poem as “islands of sound,” then we can also interpret the page as an ocean of silence.

We push the “metaphorics of the sea” further when we look closely at the structure of *A Bell Made of Stones* and a series of poems entitled “maps.” Taitano’s collection is not your average 6-inch by 9-inch paperback; instead, the book is in a large, 8.5-inch by 11-inch format, which makes it feel much more like an atlas than a poetry collection. Within this poetic atlas is a profound series of six poems titled “maps”, which further explore the themes of migration and diasporic identity. The different sections of “maps” are dispersed throughout *A Bell Made of Stones*, perhaps mirroring the dispersion of the Chamoru diaspora. Each map-poem also has a different visual appearance. The first two are in a single stanza, but placed in different parts of the page; the third is blank; the fourth and fifth

contain individual words spaced throughout the page; and the sixth is made of several shorter stanzas separated into columns. In order to read these oceanic maps, it is crucial to understand the theories and methods of Chamoru navigation.

Chamorus developed complex navigational techniques that involved reading ocean waves and currents, the location of islands, and the movements of stars, winds, clouds, birds, and fish. One technique, etak (also known as “moving islands”) is a “technique for calculating distance traveled, or position at sea, by triangulating the speed of the islands of departure and destination with that of a third reference island. This is accomplished, furthermore, by plotting these islands courses in the celestial sky, which in effect serves as a veritable map for the world below” (Diaz 2011, p. 26). The islands are conceptualized as figuratively moving along a prescribed star course. Another technique, pookof (also known as “expanding islands”) refers to “the inventory of creatures indigenous to a given island, as well as their travel habits and behavior” (ibid., p. 27). For example, if you sight a sea-going bird or sea creature associated with a certain island, then you know that island is nearby; thus, the island has figuratively expanded. Before voyagers left their island of origin, they learned and memorized the etak and pookof of their journey, and they used various kinds of visual star compasses, wave maps, and oral chants. This “ancient and time-honored mnemonic map for travel” remained “fundamentally discursive and narratological” (ibid., pp. 22, 27). Voyaging traditions fostered an intimate, genealogical kinship between Chamorus and the ocean, the islands, and marine and avian life, as well as a keen sense of environmental sustainability, maritime literacy, and ecological narrativity.

Pacific Islander navigational techniques can be applied to understanding indigenous aesthetics. Chadwick Allen makes the argument in “Siting Earthworks, Navigating Waka: Patterns of Indigenous Settlement in Allison Hedge Coke’s Blood Run and Robert Sullivan’s Star Waka”. He argues that voyaging technologies and aesthetics can function to shape a literary text’s “complex formal structures and multiple structural patterns” (Allen 2012, p. 196). He focuses on a sequence of visual poems in the book *Star Waka*, by Maori poet Robert Sullivan, which are textually and typographically shaped into waves, pitches, stars, islands, horizons, maps, and a compass. Allen proposes that the visuality of the poems “evoke primary tools for Indigenous open-water navigation” (ibid., p. 230). Through his analysis, Allen demonstrates how poetic forms (poem, line, stanza, punctuation, typeface, and blank space) and sequencing, numbering, and patterning combine to embody aspects of navigational technologies and aesthetic forms of ocean-going canoes. Inspired by this analysis, I will consider how etak and pookof might inform an interpretation of Taitano’s map poems.

The first poem in the series, “maps1,” is comprised of a single stanza of eighteen lines with no spaces between the words. The poem opens with the speaker spinning a globe to look for Guåhan. She explains a navigational “trick” to find the island:

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:: : findjapanf
irstandthep
hilippinese
condandscan
therightang
ledintersec
tiontwofig
ersmeetingm
akeiwaslost
atsea : : :
(ibid., p. 21)

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After we decipher the signs, we learn the navigational trick: locate and place your pointer and thumb on larger, recognizable (reference) islands like Japan and the Philippines; then, Guåhan will be

at the angle where those fingers intersect. Even though this “trick” is supposed to help the speaker find Guåhan on a map, it still makes her feel “lost at sea”. Perhaps she feels this way because Guåhan is so small that it sometimes does not even appear on maps, or maybe because she is lost in the diaspora without a cultural navigator to guide her home.

The second poem of the series, “maps2,” captures a traumatic moment in Taitano’s life as a diasporic child. The map-poem is set in a North Carolina classroom. The teacher, Mrs. Bradley, is calling students to the front of the room to point out where they are from on a world map. Sadly, the speaker has a difficult time finding Guåhan. Instead of helping her navigate, Mrs. Bradley pulls the speaker by her ear away from the map and embarrasses her in front of the entire class:

[mrs.bradley]sa
 idlehuayouarew
 astingourtimea
 nditwasthenikn
 ewiwasonlyhalf
 visible.

(ibid., p. 49)

This technique is what I call “diasporic etak”, in which Chamorus separated from their home islands are taught to locate Guåhan by first locating “reference islands” and then triangulating Guåhan’s position. This highlights how the trauma of migration and diaspora makes children feel helpless, ashamed, and invisible.

The feeling of invisibility is further embodied in “maps3,” which is composed of the title of the poem in the middle of an otherwise blank page. At first, reading the blank space evokes absence, distance, and silence. In this way, “maps3” can also be read as the space between arrival and departure, origin and destination, home and diaspora, silence and story. After contemplating the space of “maps3,” “maps4” arrives four pages later and presents the names of villages on Guåhan (including Taitano’s home village of Yigo), as well as names of military bases and installations, including “AFB” (Andersen Air Force Base) and “AFB munitions storage area.” When you hold the text at arm’s length, the constellation of names visually resembles an aerial view of part of Guåhan’s landmass. Even though it conjures a feeling of hope because the island has been found, it also conjures a sense of incompleteness because the shape is incomplete. At this point, I assumed the rest of the landmass would be textually shaped in “maps5”, yet the very next section we encounter is “maps6”. I retrace my inter-poem journey across the ten pages between “maps4” and “maps6” just to make sure I didn’t skip over “maps5”. Since I don’t sight the poem, I return to the table of contents and find that “maps5” is located on page 53, thirty pages before “maps4”. How did I miss this misplaced map? I turn to page 53 and realize I missed this map because the title, “maps5”, is not on the actual page. As anticipated, “maps5” does complete “maps4”, as it lists names of other villages and military bases on Guåhan. When you combine those two maps together, it completes the textual replica of the shape of Guåhan’s landmass. The effect of serializing the poem-maps and misplacing part of the expected sequence disorients the reader. The missing map page stirs up anxiety that we as readers have lost our way without a hook or any signs of home. The fragmentary nature of these two maps highlights the fragmentary identity of the Chamoru diaspora.

The map-poem series ends with “maps6”, which once again situates the reader in cyberspace. Although the exact website is not explicitly stated, we can infer that it is a website that calculates distance and directions when you input an origin and a destination. The poem opens by listing the “total distance” from North Carolina to Guåhan: 12,879.58 miles. The rest of the poem, however, fails to provide navigable directions:

The fact that the poet lists her full address in North Carolina, yet only lists the village name of Yigo, suggests that she no longer remembers her full home address. For many migrants, “Guam is only a faint memory” ([Underwood 1985](#), p. 179). The strike-through visually expresses the poet’s disappointment—and perhaps even anger—at being so far from home and not knowing if or when she will ever return. Even though the internet acts as a vehicle for diasporic Chamorus to stay connected to their home and culture, it does not fully satisfy the desire for connection and belonging.

4. Conclusions

Through her poetry, Taitano guides us through the blank and fragmented maps to show that a central part of Chamoru identity is discovering ways to creatively navigate oceanic and continental distances and remain connected to the ocean and islands, as well as the culture and language of her Chamoru ancestors, even when one is far from home. A Bell Made of Stones attempts to navigate with diaporic etak and pookof the strong currents “of home, of assimilation, of diasporas, of transoceanic communication” in order to bravely share a story about how Chamorus navigate a hyphenated, diasporic existence at the “intersections of half-ness” ([Taitano 2013](#), p. 111). The text becomes a vessel that carries her towards home and circulates her story back across the ocean and to other archipelagic spaces. For diasporic Pacific writers, the canoe has become a way “to historicize and make meaning out of the modern migration of the descendent” ([DeLoughrey 2007](#), p. 118) so that the idea of a canoe connects migrants to home and casts their migration as a global voyage.

While the Pacific Ocean has been a space of colonial politics, military, and displacement for Chamorus, it has also become a space for decolonization, revitalization, and reconnection. Despite the widespread suppression of Pacific voyaging traditions, the practice survived in some islands, including Puluwat and Satawal in Micronesia ([Gladwin 1970](#); [Finney 1976](#)). In the early 1970s, Micronesian navigators led journeys from the Federated States of Micronesia to the Mariana Islands, and even led revitalization efforts in Hawai’i on the now famous double hulled canoe, the Hokule’a. During subsequent decades, islanders across the Pacific have revitalized “the dignity of the sea-going : : : illustrious past” ([Lewis 1978](#), p. 201). Voyaging revitalization in Guåhan launched in the mid-1990s, when Manny Sikau, from Puluwat, taught navigation to the Traditional Seafaring Society at the University of Guåhan. He taught their members the techniques of etak and pookof, the stars of the star compass, and the cartography of the local archipelagoes. The Traditional Seafaring Society then purchased a 22-foot Micronesian outrigger canoe, called QUEST. They sailed it more than 500 miles from Puluwat to Guåhan in 2001, with several shorter voyages across the Marianas the next year ([Cunningham et al. 2006](#)). In 2008, a group named Traditions About Seafaring Islands built a 33-foot sakman and named it Saina, which means elder or ancestor. The following year, the crew sailed Saina to the island of Rota, 45 miles north of Guåhan. This was the first Chamoru proa built in Guåhan and sailed in the waters of the archipelago in over 250 years. In 2011, Chamorus in San Diego who were a part of the group, Sakman Chamoru Project, built a 47-foot sakman named Che’lu, which means friend, brother, or sister. The revitalization of Chamoru voyaging practices in the Marianas and in the diaspora has returned Chamorus to the sea and re-articulated the ocean as once again a space of identity, mobility, and cultural decolonization.

Many diasporic Chamorus only have a faint memory of their home island, and they often have no teacher to guide them home. Taitano’s poem-maps embody this ambivalence in content and form. Despite drifting in the diasporic sea and feeling only half visible, Taitano’s Chamoru identity is not completely lost. As diasporic Chamoru scholar Michael Perez notes: “Chamorus continue to

endure as a people in spite of their locations at the edges of US racial and ethnic relations. Notions of indigeneity are therefore not limited to being authentically located in a given place. Rather, they are located in space across various sites. Chamorus are Chamorus precisely because of their indigeneity, diasporic transnationality, resistance, consciousness, and articulation” (Perez 2002, p. 476). Navigating A Bell Made of Stones through a transoceanic reading methodology reveals how Taitano articulates a diasporic indigeneity that is routed across the ocean while also remaining rooted in Guåhan and Chamoru cultural identity. Through this watery lens, we can see how poetry becomes a map, compass, navigational chant, and a transoceanic letter home.

The Pacific Ocean of Taitano's birth and early childhood has changed dramatically, not only due to militarization over the past forty years, but also due to climate change. The impacts of the fossil fuel economy and carbon emissions has caused ocean acidification and warming, which in turn has led to coral bleaching, the mass die-off of marine species, and even the shift of currents and tides. Global warming has also caused the melting of glaciers and ice sheets at the poles, causing sea levels to rise in the Pacific, thus threatening the habitability and existence of low-lying atolls and islands, as well as the coastal areas of mountainous islands, like Guåhan. This is another key insight of the Blue Humanities: the oceans are changing, unpredictable spaces and living entities with their own agency. “Home,” then, is not what it once was, and any romanticized “return” to the home island and ocean must reckon with historical changes. Moreover, we must also reckon with new diasporic futures in the Pacific for generations of climate migrants and refugees, who are already considering ways to “migrate with dignity.” How we navigate our relationship to the ocean in a time of climate change will indeed be one of the most important questions for Pacific Islanders and Blue Humanities scholars.

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